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ABSTRACT

Interviews with representatives from nine states (Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Iowa, Ohio [Canton City Schools only], Oregon, Rhode Island, and West Virginia) and two nations (Australia and the United Kingdom) provided a context for the development of a certificate of basic or foundational skills as an indicator of an adult's job-readiness. The interviews were intended to ascertain how Pennsylvania can develop, structure, and implement an interim basic skills certificate indicating proficiency for adults without high school or General Educational Development diplomas. A synthesis of responses indicated some states focus on basic skills, others on work skills, and some on both; reasons for developing certificates were similar, although some states had deeper commitment and connection to business; and processes for developing certificates varied widely: some states used multiple assessments; others, primarily CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System). States awarded certificates at the local or state level. Implementing the certificate had implications for professional development of staff in adult literacy programs. Many employers accepted the certificates, but much more should be done to ensure buy-in and strengthen their acceptance. Liability, based on assessment validity and what the certificate indicated, was a legal concern in most states; two states developed disclaimers to avoid legal battles and two would retrain if an employee no longer demonstrated the skills that the certificate indicated. Learners and employers benefitted. Difficulties were teacher and administrator resistance, reaching consensus on the competencies, and performing reliable, valid assessment. (YLB)

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Basic Skills Certificate Development: A Report on State and National Systems

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Basic Skills Certificate Development: A Report on State and National Systems

Abstract

Interviews with representatives from nine of the United States and two nations provided a context for the state of basic or foundational skills as an index of an adult's proficiency in basic and/or workplace skills. These interviews were conducted by staff from the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, College of Education at The Pennsylvania State University to ascertain how Pennsylvania can best develop, structure, and implement an interim basic skills certificate that will indicate proficiency for those adults without high school diplomas or GEDs. A staff member of the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy worked with By The Numbers to analyze the data and prepare a report synthesizing the interviews.

A synthesis of the responses to the interview questions indicates the following. Some states focus on basic skills, others on work skills, and some on both. Reasons for developing the certificates were similar, although some states had deeper commitment and connection to business. The processes for developing the certificates varied widely. Some states use multiple assessments, while others primarily use the CASAS. Responsibility differs; certificates are awarded at the local level by some states and at the state level by others. Most learners and employers learn about the basic skills certificate at the local level. Implementing the basic skills certificate has had implications for professional development of staff in adult literacy programs. Many employers accept the certificates, but much more must be done to ensure buy-in and strengthen their acceptance. Liability, based on the validity of assessment and what the certificate indicates, is a legal concern in most states; two states have developed disclaimers to avoid legal battles and two will retrain if an employee no longer demonstrates the skills indicated by the certificate. Benefits have been reported to the learners and to the employers. Difficulties include teacher and administrator resistance, reaching consensus on the competencies, and performing reliable, valid assessment. Most sites are directly linked with K-12 standards.

Background

In 2000, the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, College of Education at The Pennsylvania State University, initiated an investigation into the development of an interim basic skills certificate in the state of Pennsylvania to indicate that an individual is proficient in basic skills and knowledge and is capable of performing entry-level job-related tasks. The basic skills certificate is intended to serve as an indicator of job-readiness for those adults who have not yet obtained a high school diploma or equivalency diploma. This study was funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE). Representatives from two nations and from nine of the United States that already had in place or were in the process of developing such certificates were contacted and interviewed by a staff member of the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy. The nations and states that were involved included: Australia and the United Kingdom; Arkansas, California, Colorado,

Delaware, Iowa, Ohio (Canton City Schools, only), Oregon, Rhode Island, and West Virginia. Ohio is confined to the Canton City Schools because there is no statewide certificate in that state.

Some of the nations and states interviewed (California, Rhode Island, and the United Kingdom) are still in the process of developing and/or implementing their basic skills certificate; therefore they were not able to provide answers to all of the questions. Oregon has had a Basic Skills certificate, but it is no longer in use. However, this state is investigating the need for a comprehensive list of competencies. Among the states, it was evident that their basic skills certifications have varying levels of breadth, comprehensiveness, and acceptance. Yet, there were many similarities.

Procedures

Contacts were made by phone to each of the sites. Informed consent was requested and granted according to protocol and all interviews were tape-recorded with the interviewee's knowledge. The tapes were then transcribed. Each representative was asked fourteen questions (with probes) regarding their state's or nation's basic skills certificate in terms of the following: reason for developing it; process to determine competencies; structure; state (or national) and local responsibilities; recruitment; changes as a result of its implementation; legal considerations; benefits; difficulties; usefulness to learners, instructors, and employers; school-linked standards; and general recommendations. A staff member of the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy worked with By The Numbers to analyze the data and prepare a report synthesizing the interviews.

Results

The interviewer prefaced each interview with a definition of basic skills certification:

> ***"We are defining an interim basic skills certification as a document indicating that an individual is proficient in specific basic skills and knowledge and is capable of performing entry-level job-related tasks. The certificate would address the needs of adult learners who have not yet obtained a high school equivalency diploma or similar document."***

The interview questions and salient responses culled from the interviews with each of the states or nations contacted provide a synthesis of the development of basic skills certification to date. Implications, based on the sites' suggestions, are also indicated.

1. To what extent does your state's (or nation's) definition match or diverge from this one? In what ways?

Summary: States and nations with established basic skill certification focus on basic/life skills, work-related skills, or both. Colorado, Delaware, and Iowa emphasize basic skills. Delaware's is not defined as "interim." Arkansas's emphasis is on work-related employability

skills and is directly linked to the state's industry, while the certificates from Australia, The United Kingdom, the Canton City Schools (Ohio), and West Virginia, are or will be comprised of both basic/life skills and work-related skills. Oregon offered a state certificate in the past; it is now investigating competencies but will not be offering a state certificate. California is mostly ESL at the present time. Rhode Island is still developing its certificate structure and process.

Implications: Use both foundational skills (basic skills) and work-related skills for maximum value in the definition.

Definition Focus	Number of States/Nations
Both basic and work-related skills	4
Primarily basic skills	3
Primarily work-related skills	1

Australia: Australia has a well-established national system for basic skills certification, created mutually by its states and territories, with eight core national accreditation competency-based principles and curriculum. States are free to develop their own certificates as long as they meet these eight principles. Basic skills certificates address three areas: capacity for paid or voluntary work, personal life, and participation in the democratic process. Thus, both basic skills and work-related skills are considered.

United Kingdom: Adult basic level education has been historically unregulated and undefined. There has been no national definition of "capability." Certification is being developed.

Arkansas: Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE) aligns with the definition, but it is more employer driven. Employers are regarded as clients; students as products; thus the focus is on the employers.

California: California Education Code section 52655 authorizes the California Department of Education to establish levels of performance and issue certificates of proficiency. Two California laws require an employability focus and have an instructional intensity of 12 or more hours per week. California is primarily ESL.

Colorado: Colorado's Certificate of Accomplishment is similar to the proposed Pennsylvania certificate but has less emphasis on employment. It pre-dates the Workforce Investment Act (WIA); instead it focuses on broader range of life skills.

Delaware: A Basic Skills Certificate (not "interim") indicates that an individual has demonstrated knowledge and skills in specific skills (listed on the certificate).

Iowa: Iowa does not specifically designate the certificate as work skills; instead it is a basic literacy skills certificate.

Ohio: Ohio does not yet have a state certificate; however, The Canton City School District in Ohio has a career Passport that matches this definition of proficiency in basic skills and entry-level job related tasks to provide an interim certificate prior to the GED.

Oregon: Oregon in the past offered a state certificate. It has subsequently spent three years trying to define what an interim basic skills certificate would be, how it would meet legal liability concerns, how it can be supported by assessment by individual teachers, and how it can be validated against entry-level standards.

Rhode Island: Rhode Island has a similar definition and is in the process of developing skills for the adult secondary level.

West Virginia: West Virginia's basic skill certificate is awarded to adult learners who have not yet obtained a GED or EDP but who score a minimum of 8th grade level on the reading, math, and language tests of ABLE (TABE after July 1) or 231 CASAS reading and 221 CASAS math. The certificate has additional competency-based work-related skills listed on the back (writing, listening, speaking, and thinking); mastery is 80%.

2. ***Why did your state (or nation) decide to pursue development of an interim basic skills certificate?***

Summary: To address the problems of low high school completion rates and of low literacy/numeracy, Australia and the United Kingdom, respectively, implemented or will implement basic skills competencies. Colorado, Canton City Schools (Ohio), Delaware, Iowa, Rhode Island, and West Virginia pursued the certificate as a way to be accountable to students, create a foundation for employment, and, with the exception of the Canton City Schools, establish a statewide system. California's impetus came from state laws. Arkansas pursued it because of a corporate-driven need for competent workers.

Implications: Consider Pennsylvania's purpose for creating a basic skills certificate and develop the process, assessment, and structure accordingly.

Reason for Developing Interim Basic Skills Certificate *(Multiple Reasons Given by Sites)*	**Number of States/Nations**
Program accountability	6
Document student progress	6
Increase employability	6
Establish statewide system	5

Australia: Low rates of completion of high school in some states led to the interim basic skills certificate. Certificates were created as a curriculum framework for the nation, including basic skills and work-based skills. There is reciprocity among states and territories in accepting the certificate.

United Kingdom: In England there are 7 million adults with low-level literacy and 5 million with low-level numeracy. Basic skills had been marginalized. Local programs for the past 7-8 years have come together to develop qualification standards.

Arkansas: The development of Arkansas's certificate was corporate- and community-driven, with the impetus coming from a large company that had difficulty finding competent and trained workers. Competencies, curricula, and assessments were developed based on research and industry input. To date, there are three certificates: industrial, clerical, and employability.

California: Two California state laws, the California ESL standards adopted in 1992 and ABE and adult secondary program standards adopted in 1996, led to the development of performance indicators and performance measures to verify level and completion for ABE and ESL to benchmark student progress. A strand on employability was included so that employers would be able to determine qualifications for entry-level jobs.

Colorado: Accountability to learners and accountability of programs reporting verifiable learner progress led to Colorado's certificate of basic skills. Additionally, Colorado was hoping to achieve statewide consistency in a blend of basic academic and basic life skills and provide the learners with concrete recognition of their achievements. Employers' needs were considered, but had less importance when the certificate was developed in 1993.

Delaware: Delaware chose to pursue a basic skills certificate system to establish a statewide mechanism that would recognize and document specific skills so that recipients would be rewarded and see their own learning continuum and could enter into employment with verification of those skills. Its certificate was developed in 1992 and has served as a model for Colorado and Rhode Island.

Iowa: Iowa pursued the development of an interim basic skills certificate to establish accountability and to document and quantify learner gains for the benefit of the learner, potential employers, and other stakeholders such as the federal and state governments. Its certificate was developed in 1997.

Ohio: Welfare Reform provided the impetus for Canton City Schools to create the Passport as an indicator of employability for entry-level positions and certain skill attainment prior to the GED.

Oregon: Oregon has established assessments and indicators that are based on three years of research, but is not offering a basic skills certificate.

Rhode Island: Like Delaware, Colorado, and West Virginia, Rhode Island wanted to provide students with tangible evidence of their competencies for personal satisfaction and for an employability portfolio that would indicate demonstration of basic skills.

West Virginia: West Virginia created their certificates as a verification of mastery of skills and as a foundation for an employability portfolio. The Basic Skills certificate was one of four certificates of mastery. Its certificate was developed in 1997.

3. *What process has been used to develop the competencies on which the certificate is based?*

Summary: In all of the states or nations contacted, except Ohio (which is not a statewide program), federal or state government committees created or are creating core knowledge and skills for competencies and to establish curriculum. Additional input was sought from a variety sources, including: corporations, teachers, universities, curriculum specialists, and community colleges. CASAS provided guidance for many states in the development of the competencies.

Implications: Request and use feedback from multiple and diverse sources, including adult educators, business and industry, universities, and curriculum specialists at both the state and local level.

Process for Developing Competencies	Number of States/Nations
State or national initiation	10
Local initiation	1

Australia: A committee set up by the federal government (1992) researched core knowledge and skills for individuals to function in society and the workplace. This is continually upgraded to reflect changes in competencies.

United Kingdom: In spring 1999, a federal effort was made to benchmark where people are and to identify their needs. The government contracted work out to the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA). A national strategy report outlined national competencies and proposed a comprehensive curriculum that is now under review.

Arkansas: In the 1980's Arkansas's major industries pushed for the development of work-related competencies. Industry input and research into basic skills resulted in the state's creation of the certificates, which have been copyrighted and published.

California: In 1998, CASAS conducted a study for the California Department of Education, the *California Adult Basic Skills Survey*, which went to employers, employment and training providers, state and local social service offices, welfare department, adult education providers, instructors, and students across the state. The survey was used to determine priorities for employment and how basic skills can be taught, assessed, and certified. Additionally, the

survey was used to determine discrepancies between employers, providers, and students in the perceived importance of various competencies.

Colorado: Competencies were selected by a task force of adult educators and then field tested at eleven pilot sites for one year. CASAS provided guidance.

Delaware: Delaware used a seven-step process: (1) clarify rationale for developing a basic skills certificate, (2) clarify purpose, (3) determine skills and competencies, (4) determine how to verify skills and performance levels, (5) define process for awarding the certificates, (6) field test and modify, and (7) training. Formative evaluation occurred at each step.

Iowa: Iowa's community college-based adult basic education program completed a number of research studies to identify critical issues (1980-1997) for program planning. One issue was documenting student learning through the attainment of workforce and life skills competencies. The research, begun in 1982, was highly structured, systematic, and comprehensive. CASAS provided a foundation.

Ohio: The interview took place with a representative from the Canton City Schools about their basic skills Passport. As noted above, there is no state of Ohio basic skills certification.

Oregon: Oregon has identified basic skills, foundation skills, workforce readiness skills, and pre-employment work maturity competence.

Rhode Island: Rhode Island first investigated what other states were doing, with an emphasis on Delaware's program. They studied CASAS as an assessment tool and had teachers test it. Employers and WIA partners considered the materials' relevancy to entry-level skills.

West Virginia: The competencies were developed as part of a skills curriculum, pulled together by teachers in the state with input from business and industry, partnering agencies, university representatives, vocational directors, and state leaders. The competencies were then revised and refined. Competencies with learning activities were tested by teachers and revised. A curriculum specialist reviewed the competency list and learning activities. The process is fluid and continuous to maintain relevancy.

4. How is the program structured?

Summary: The structures of the programs differ across nations and states. Criteria from some states (nations) are multiple assessment – portfolio-based, national or state competency checklists, and/or rubric scoring, as well as standardized tests. Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Canton City Schools (Ohio), and West Virginia use multiple assessments. California, Iowa, and Oregon use CASAS.

Implications: Use multiple assessments, both standardized and alternative.

Process for Developing Competencies	Number of States/Nations
Multiple assessments	8
CASAS	2

Australia: Australia issues level one and level two certificates, which are locally assessed. Qualifications for High School Students is one of the highest certificates as is the Tertiary Preparation Certificate, which is intended for adults returning after a long absence. There are centralized assessments for the higher levels. The certificates are national certificates, and are issued by the states.

United Kingdom: No national level certificate has been developed yet. The old system had more than 100 different awards, none tied to national competencies, which the interviewee regarded as useless. With the new regulations and curriculum developed, certificates will be issued based on the national competencies.

Arkansas: This program is structured like basic adult education – open entry and open exit, with the learner determining the time needed to complete. The program is highly customized and contextual for a community's employment needs. One hundred percent proficiency is required for all certificates. Portfolios and performance based-assessment based on LTAs at a minimum of six industries are required for some certificates. A TABE assessment is required for two certificates. The state has also developed its own assessment with input from industry, the WAGE assessment test. The state confers the certificate after the learner submits the portfolio to a WAGE office.

California: Currently California is strictly CASAS for local certification. It is still field-testing the process for statewide use, and is developing a new assessment series in reading, math, and listening comprehension that will include and target priority competencies identified by employers. Local programs have developed local exit tests and issue local certificates of proficiency, but there is not yet any uniform state effort to standardize these activities.

Colorado: Mastery is by performance assessment verified in a portfolio. Learners work under a teacher's supervision to complete verification for assessment for each competency listed on the back of each certificate. There are three levels of ABE with about 50 competencies for each level. This is augmented with placement test scores and a competency checklist. This assessment notebook is submitted to the state. CASAS is also used.

Delaware: Delaware uses multiple assessments (TABE, ABLE, AIMS) with a diagnostic/prescriptive approach. Local programs determine if a student meets skill proficiency. Students submit portfolios to the state for review. The state issues the certificate.

Iowa: Iowa uses the CASAS taxonomy A-D for reading and math only.

Ohio: There are five steps to Ohio's employability component: self-awareness, work awareness, decision-making, planning, and employment. These are coupled with basic skills training documented in a portfolio. CASAS will be used exclusively in 2001.

Oregon: Oregon is a CASAS state but also uses other assessments, particularly for communication. The local eligible provider issues level certificates for reading, math, writing, and speaking/listening based on upward movement through the federal levels. CASAS or BEST are used statewide as assessment instruments. Work Keys assessment is being considered for inclusion in the certificate-issuing process in the future. SCANS competencies are also used for work-related competencies.

Rhode Island: Still in the development stage, Rhode Island uses checklists and rubric scoring to determine level. It is hoped that certificates will be conferred at the state level.

West Virginia: Students must have 80% mastery designated for each of the certificates (including the basic skills certificate). Verification of mastery is maintained in the classroom portfolio and is evaluated by performance-based checklists. Performance-based checklists and standards for mastery are uniform across the state. SCANS and ASTD's Workplace Basics have been used.

5. What are the state (or national) and local programs' responsibilities in terms of determining learners' completion of work needed to obtain the certificate?

Summary: Australia has both state and national reporting. In the United Kingdom, certificates will be issued locally. The state has or will have responsibility in Arkansas, Colorado, and Delaware. Local programs have responsibility in California (at present), Iowa, Ohio, and Oregon. West Virginia has a regional link between local and state programs, where the state evaluates the portfolio and confers the certificate but either the local teacher or regional coordinator issues the certificate to the student. Rhode Island has not yet determined responsibility.

Implications: The certificates carry more value when they are state conferred but locally awarded. The regional link in West Virginia transitions the certification process between the state and localities.

State versus Local Responsibility for Determining Learner's Completion of Work	Number of States/Nations
Both state and local are responsible	3
State is responsible	2
Local is responsible	2

Australia: Australia maintains both a state and national register, so the system involves certification that is national and is recognized in all states and territories. The first level course is locally designed and assessed; the second level is both local and centralized.

United Kingdom: Certificates will be issued by the teacher at the local program. There are two types of certificates: portfolio-based (entry, 1, 2) and a centralized, on-demand, test-based certificate. The latter will be more readily accepted by employers.

Arkansas: The state directs all activities. All programs must be WAGE certified centers before WAGE classes can be conducted. Portfolios are turned into the state, which also issues competencies.

California: Because their program is still being developed, California has not determined responsibility. However, at present it uses CASAS as the sole assessment for issuance of local certificates. Local certificates are offered.

Colorado: The state creates and distributes resources, conducts training, reviews assessment notebooks, issues certificates, keeps the database, markets the program to project administrators, and establishes and changes policy. Local programs sell it to the teachers, develop curriculum and implementation strategies, track progress, assign staff and volunteers, instruct, assess, and provide learner recognition. Local programs must submit materials and applications directly to the state, including the learner's test scores, portfolio, and competencies, in order for the learner to receive the Colorado Certificate of Accomplishment.

Delaware: The local program reports to the state after the student has demonstrated the competencies and the state issues the certificate. The portfolio is assessed by two readers from the state (a third, if necessary). Certificates of Educational Attainment (CEAs) are awarded by the state.

Iowa: The local programs are very well trained. They do all CASAS assessment, maintain all student records, and issues certificates. They report to the state the number of certificates issued, and issue them as numbered certificates for location identification purposes.

Ohio: Because Ohio does not have a statewide program, the responsibilities are all local. The Canton City Schools issue the certificate, which is meaningful only for local employers.

Oregon: In Oregon, local eligible providers will issue level certificates, based on CASAS assessments.

Rhode Island: Still in the development stage, this state has not determined where responsibilities will lie.

West Virginia: Regional coordinators link local programs to the state by delivering portfolios from the local teacher to the state for evaluation and by returning the portfolio either approved or the non-approved (with suggestions for completion). The state confers the certificate, which is issued by either the regional coordinator or the teacher.

6. *How have you disseminated information about the certificate to learner? To basic skills programs? To employers?*

Summary: In nearly all states, learners find out about programs from teachers or from other students at the local program level. Training Advisory Boards in Australia help to disseminate information to employers, but most of the sites interviewed have local programs contact employers. In Iowa, the program is promoted by a variety of groups, teachers, cooperating agencies, social workers, and corrections officials. Iowa's community college consortium markets the certificate to programs and employers. The Workforce Education Department in Arkansas, which is regionalized throughout the state, brokers all services. West Virginia disseminates information at both the state and local levels.

Implications: Students and local employers are more likely to learn about the certificate from local providers; however, state support and backing will help to make this consistent.

State versus Local Dissemination of Information to Learners and Employers	Number of States/Nations
Both state and local dissemination	4
Local dissemination	2
State dissemination	1

Australia: Local advertising by the providers lets potential students know about the programs. Industry Training Advisory Boards also provide a link for dissemination.

United Kingdom: Question not covered.

Arkansas: The state markets the program through its Workforce Education Department, which is regionalized throughout the state and brokers all services, including WAGE.

California: Question not covered.

Colorado: Teachers in classes market the programs to potential students. Local programs are responsible for contacting employers in the area.

Delaware: Monthly meetings with all adult education administrators provide a forum for distribution of manuals for students (recruitment). The Human Resource Investment Council markets the programs. Work place programs also give presentations to management teams about the certificates.

Iowa: Teachers, cooperating agencies, social workers, corrections groups, and workforce assessors all promote the program. Learners themselves are the best advertisement. The

community college consortium, which participated in the creation of the certificate, helps in marketing to programs and employers.

Ohio: It is a local program and therefore has local dissemination.

Oregon: Information to the learners is disseminated through local programs.

Rhode Island: Since Rhode Island is a geographically small state, the state calls meetings of local providers and teachers to share information. The state has not determined whether to do a mass mailing to employers or have local chambers organize local presentations at lunch meetings.

West Virginia: The state has developed three brochures for three audiences: for students to make them aware of what the certificates mean; for teachers to show how the certificates relate to the curriculum; and for employers to create awareness of the certificates' worth. These are distributed by teachers at the local level at intake, at staff meetings, and at open houses. The state also distributes these widely.

7. ***To what extent did implementation of the certificate system change local programs in terms of staff training, instructional practices, local collaboration, or other program-related operations?***

Summary: There were diverse answers to this question; however, increased staff development was indicated by a majority of those interviewed. Other changes included dealing with teacher resistance to changes in curricula and teaching methods, greater retention and student interest, improved communication with businesses, and the need to use volunteers to augment staff.

Implications: Pennsylvania must plan to provide professional development in the use of basic skills certificate. Tying into existing reporting systems will help staff to accept its use.

Principal Changes in Local Programs	Number of States/Nations
Additional professional development for program staff	6
Dealing with teacher resistance	2

Australia: It was necessary to deal with resistance on the part of teachers and students who preferred traditional teaching methods.

United Kingdom: The implementation of the system has changed local programs dramatically in that there has been resistance from teachers who were not part of the development process.

Arkansas: The WAGE program is employer driven and has continued to strengthen the collaborative bonds. WAGE provides training to new affiliates, many of which are on-site in industry.

California: Question not covered.

Colorado: Local programs have become more comfortable in terms of student progress. The implementation system has resulted in increased interest and the need to use volunteers to augment staff.

Delaware: Implementation has changed the way programs talk to students – in terms of a learning continuum. There has been additional staff training.

Iowa: The state is becoming totally competency and accountability based. More instructors are aware of the levels of certificates and that they are appropriate for some, but not all, students.

Ohio: There has been some staff trained to ensure that the staff uses the competency list well. The Passport has improved communication with businesses and organizations.

Oregon: Question not covered.

Rhode Island: Question not covered.

West Virginia: There has been increased staff development for teachers to be to be certified to issue a certificate. They are required to have six hours of initial training, plus annual re-certification of three hours of training.

8. To what extent do employers accept the certificate as proof of the certificate holder's skills?

Summary: In general, employers accept the certificate in all of the states and nations that have developed the certificate, especially where it has been in use for a while. Most indicated that there is a need to strengthen its acceptance, however.

Implications: Strengthening ties to employers is critical for acceptance. Ensuring that students can demonstrate skills beyond the classroom is also critical.

Do Employers Accept the Certificate?	Number of States/Nations
Somewhat/It depends	4
Yes	3
No	0

Australia: In one area of use, 70% of employers are happy with the TAFE certificate as indicated in a national study. Based on state issuance, employers were at different stages of acceptance.

United Kingdom: Question not covered.

Arkansas: Because of industry's role in the development of the certificate, employers are very aware of them. Some give preference to potential or on-board employees who have earned the certificate, if all else is equal.

California: Question not covered.

Colorado: There are too few individuals with certification to make employers widely aware of the certificate's value. A new workforce/workplace staff member will be responsible for informing employers about the certificate process and value.

Delaware: Some companies have incorporated levels of the certificate into their career ladders and financial bonus programs. There has not been a statewide survey of employers. In general, there is too little awareness at present; however, students have been able to talk about their job skills as related to the certificate, which has impressed some employers.

Iowa: Iowa has collected little data about employer acceptance.

Ohio: Canton City Schools received employer feedback about the Passports before they were implemented. In general, employers like the Passport.

Oregon: Employers were involved in identifying priority competencies for Workplace Basics in 1991. Local employers find the certificate to be an indicator of skills.

Rhode Island: Question not covered.

West Virginia: Acceptance varies. In some areas teachers have made an effort to promote the certificates, and there they are widely valued.

9. Are there legal considerations to bear in mind in the development of a certificate system?

Summary: Nearly all of those interviewed indicated that liability and/or competency and assessment validity issues were a concern. Iowa has a disclaimer on its certificate, while Colorado indicates the date on which student earned certification in order to avoid legal battles. Both the Canton City Schools and the state of Delaware will retrain adults whose competencies no longer match certificate levels.

Implications: Pennsylvania should consider the use of a disclaimer or retraining in order to address liability concerns.

Methods Used to Address Liability Concerns	Number of States/Nations
Disclaimer	2
Willingness to retrain	2

Australia: There are wide a range of legal considerations, mostly based on liability and validity, despite the acceptance among states of the certificates.

United Kingdom: Since this is government approved there are no liability considerations under their legal system.

Arkansas: Liability is a concern.

California: Question not covered.

Colorado: Liability concerns for stating a student has the competencies are addressed by indicating the date on which the competencies were demonstrated. Another legal issue is permission to publish comments from adult learners and permission to use published materials for assessment.

Delaware: Liability concerns are addressed by indicating that the competencies were demonstrated in a learning situation and may not necessarily be transferable. Delaware offers retraining to any student who can no longer demonstrate a competency on the certificate.

Iowa: Iowa has a disclaimer on the back of its certificate that states there is an 85% probability the student can demonstrate the competencies the certificate represents. The disclaimer states that the certificate was awarded based on demonstrated performance in reading and math on CASAS and that the individual may possess additional skills not related to the certificate.

Ohio: Canton City Schools will retrain any student who cannot demonstrate the competencies on the Passport.

Oregon: In 1999 the state developed policies and guidelines for local programs to follow in regard to verification.

Rhode Island: No legal considerations to date.

West Virginia: Validating the mastery of the performance checklist is an issue. The checklist is being re-tooled to be aligned with CASAS since it is a standardized tool. At present, the checklist is backed up by the portfolio.

10. What have been the benefits of using the certificate system for learners, basic skills programs, and/or employers?

Summary: In most states, benefits for the students were validation of skills, award of achievement, and retention. Arkansas also mentioned relevancy and context of the teaching materials. Most states indicated accountability as both a program and an employer benefit. Australia indicated that the re-education of its teachers to a facilitator role and the students' responsibility for their own learning were benefits.

Implications: Earning the certificate has great value to successful students. Award ceremonies will strengthen the issuance. Continue staff development to ensure accountability.

Principal Benefits of the Certificate System	Number of States/Nations
Learner satisfaction	6
Program accountability	4

Australia: The reeducation of teachers and of student has been beneficial, moving teachers to facilitators and helping students to understand their new role as learners. Teachers' professional development has grown because of the support. It has been a benefit to "second chance" students who had been previously marginalized. The certificate gives a sense of certainty and assurance of a common educational system, but with room for local flexibility.

United Kingdom: Question not covered.

Arkansas: The firm connection between work and school is the benefit. Curricula are based on actual work materials to provide context and relevance, and link directly to work.

California: This state is still at a piloting stage. Its field test committee is looking at the certification in a very methodical way.

Colorado: The certificate process benefits the learners, who then become the best marketers for the process. Accountability for the state and local programs is also a benefit.

Delaware: The certificate benefits the learner by providing acknowledgement of skills and providing a learning continuum. There is better retention of students. The process is organizing local programs better. For businesses it provides a fairly accurate look at skill level for hiring into entry-level positions and for promotion.

Iowa: In an August 1998 report, *First Year Evaluation of Iowa's Basic Skills Certification Program*, reports from the four pilot site community colleges indicated high learner satisfaction with the certificate program, as indicated by observations and quotes from the learners.

Ohio: More students are employed. Students have gained confidence. Businesses are better able to match job openings to applicants, thereby leading to better retention.

Oregon: Question not covered.

Rhode Island: Question not covered.

West Virginia: Student retention and success in getting job. Certificates provide a means of recruitment of students and accountability to employers.

11. What difficulties were encountered either during development or implementation of the certificate system? How were the difficulties resolved?

Summary: Several threads were evident in the difficulties mentioned. Teacher and/or administrator resistance was a difficulty in Australia, Colorado, and West Virginia. Obtaining high-level government support was a difficulty in the United Kingdom. The up-front work and time involved were difficulties in Arkansas, where the industry connection is very strong. Reaching consensus on the competencies and on reliable/valid assessment were difficulties mentioned by both Oregon and Delaware. Legal difficulties are anticipated by California.

Implications: Solid, comprehensive, and continuing communication with all parties is critical to avoid difficulties.

Principal Difficulties Encountered	Number of States/Nations
Teacher/administrator resistance	3
Identifying reliable/valid assessment tools	2
Reaching consensus on competencies	2

Australia: Teacher resistance has been allayed by flexible curriculum standards. Getting total buy-in to the competency-based approach was another difficulty.

United Kingdom: Difficulties included getting government support and promotion by high-level people, not enough ownership (especially from the practitioners), and not involving employers.

Arkansas: There is a lot of up front work with no funding vehicle to offset the hours spent working with the community and workplace to customize the basic skills program.

California: California has had no major difficulties to date. They anticipate a need to address legal concerns such as privacy and social security issues.

Colorado: There have been two major difficulties: selling the certificate process to administrators because it meant documenting progress of learners in a verifiable way, and turnover time in assessing portfolios, which has since been overcome.

Delaware: Several difficulties were indicated: (1) getting individuals to agree about the core elements, which was reached by defining what is really important and determining how to measure these elements; (2) getting staff to follow directions so as not to skew results; and (3) "gray" areas, which caused problems for verifying competency. Obtaining input from program administrators and curriculum development staff has helped.

Iowa: Iowa reported no difficulties to overcome, but indicated that the certification took significant time, effort, and research to complete.

Ohio: Creating the competency list and creating the appropriate assessments to standardize it caused some difficulty.

Oregon: Training and retraining to ensure that the tools are being used reliably and with validity were the main difficulties.

Rhode Island: Rhode Island has had no difficulties in development to date.

West Virginia: Getting teachers to teach in a different way from GED teaching was a challenge. Staff development, experiencing success, and finding that the process is not time-consuming have helped to overcome resistance.

12. What could be done to make issuance of these certificates more useful to learners? To basic skills instructors? To employers?

Summary: In general, working more closely with industry and exchanging more information with employers would make the certificates more useful. This was indicated by Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, and West Virginia. Most states thought the students were satisfied with, and proud of, the certificate.

Implications: Make issuance of the certificates an event for the students and their families. Work closely with employers to gain their feedback and buy-in and in order to make the certificates more useful.

Australia: Question not covered.

United Kingdom: Question not covered.

Arkansas: This state has been working on basic skills certification for ten years. One suggestion for improving the process of issuing the certificates is to work more closely with new state industries (in the case of Arkansas, customer service and construction) to meet more student needs.

California: Question not covered.

Colorado: Reducing the number of competencies for each certificate level will help. Changes in the certificate will aid the learner, especially the technology endorsement. Local programs and the state need to do a more comprehensive job of informing employers so that the certificate is more valued.

Delaware: Delaware is satisfied that its certificate is already useful to the learner. Working through local Chambers of Commerce may help to raise awareness of the certificates among business.

Iowa: Iowa's issuance of certificates is satisfactory for students, teachers, and employers.

Ohio: Standardizing the testing to determine competencies for the portfolio will improve the certificate.

Oregon: Question not covered.

Rhode Island: Question not covered.

West Virginia: A more focused statewide marketing campaign to employers would help increase the value of the certificates. This would result in more teachers being willing to issue certificates.

13. Does your state's (or nation's) K-12 system have academic standards? Did the interim skills certificate project link with them in any way?

Summary: All of the states' and nations' basic skills certificates, except Iowa's and Arkansas', were deliberately aligned with K-12 standards to establish consistency and credibility. In Iowa, the K-12 system is based on Grade Level Equivalency, but competency-based education is not GLE oriented.

Implications: Linking with K-12 standards strengthens accountability and consistency.

Are Skill Certificates Linked with K-12 Standards?	Number of States/Nations
Yes	9
No	2

Australia: There is a K-12 standards system. The Certificate of General Education for Adults matches the system.

United Kingdom: K-12 standards are five years old. The new certificate will be aligned and curriculum will be very similar, but tailored for adults.

Arkansas: There is a K-12 standards system.

California: California had K-12 standards implemented in 1999, the SAT 9. At present the certificate effort is parallel, but there is no direct relationship.

Colorado: There is a K-12 standards system, and the certificate was deliberately aligned for each competency.

Delaware: There is a K-12 state standards system and the basic skills certificate will align in order to gain credibility.

Iowa: The K-12 system is based on Grade Level Equivalency, but competency-based education is not GLE oriented.

Oregon: The various certificates will be tied to K-12 standards.

Rhode Island: There are plans to link with the state's K-12 academic standards.

West Virginia: West Virginia's certificate and K-12 standards are linked. The term Instructional Goals and Objectives (IGO) is used in both systems.

14. Do you have anything to add or any general recommendations to make about your state's (nation's) basic skills certification?

Summary: Four of those interviewed recommended working closely with employers to ensure buy-in. Four also suggested ensuring validity and consistency of the certification.

Australia: Question not covered.

United Kingdom: Because learners shy away from the terms basic and literacy, do not use the term "basic skills" or "literacy"; instead use "core skills."

Arkansas: Arkansas uniquely focuses on the industry-connect, so that the industry is the "client" and the student is the "product." To develop this system requires a lot of work and effort. The interviewee cautioned against a basic certificate that would not have much meaning.

Colorado: The interviewee suggested working closely with project directors, teachers, and employers to ensure buy-in.

California: Be sure to determine what is being certified and how to guarantee it.

Delaware: Bring regional people together to ensure that verification is calibrated at all skill levels. Articulate the program's purpose in order to hone skill descriptors, assessment, and evaluation. Do not have the assessment drive instruction. Work with employers to ensure they see how the certificates are to their benefit.

Iowa: Ensure that the certificate is oriented to adult education and is thoroughly backed up by accountability and research to avoid legal issues.

Ohio: Include in the basic skills such skills as teamwork, problem solving, listening, and speaking.

Oregon: Question not covered.

Rhode Island: Ensure that the measurement is valid, and maintain consistency with assessment.

West Virginia: Create a strong group of business and agency representatives to have business buy-in.

Conclusions

For those states and nations that have implemented a basic skills certificate, the results have been favorably received by adult students, employers, and education programs. To improve the acceptability of the certificate by employers, much work must be done by the education program to familiarize the employers with the certificate, its purpose, and its potential for hiring and for promotion. Multiple assessment, rather than reliance on only one assessment tool, is recommended. Pennsylvania has many options to consider when adopting this basis skills certificate, and should use as resources those states whose certificates are aligned with the Pennsylvania ideal.

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